

# הימים דרך THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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### UNITY AND JOINT RESPONSIBILITY ARE THE FOUNDATION OF ISRAEL'S EXISTENCE (by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

**O**n the verse that states, "You are standing today, all of you" (Deuteronomy 29:9), Rashi explains as follows: This teaches us that on the day of his death, Moses assembled the Children of Israel before the Holy One, blessed be He, in order to enter them into a covenant. In regards to this, the Ohr HaHayim raises the following question: What was the reason for this covenant, since it was already stated, "These are the words of the covenant" (Ibid. 28:69)? He also asks why it was necessary to specify "the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers" rather than simply, in a more general way, "all of you". He answers by saying that by this covenant, Moses wanted to make them responsible for one another (see Shavuot 39a) so that everyone would watch that his neighbor not transgress G-d's covenant, each of them being subject to punishment for the sins of others.

In my humble opinion, in saying "For you to pass into the covenant of the L-RD your G-d and into His imprecation" (Deuteronomy 29:11), Moses wanted that the covenant between the two parties make of them a united whole. This would be accomplished by virtue of the joint responsibility between individuals that formed the Children of Israel into a single body. This is the concept of leavrecha ("For you to pass into"), which is composed of the same letters as learevcha ("to make you a guarantor for the other"). This is like a man and a woman who marry and become like a single body by means of Chuppah and Kiddushin (see Ketubot 7b).

This is the sense of Rashi's remark when he said, "This teaches us that Moses assembled them [kinsam]." Rashi uses the same word as the one that signifies the espousal of a woman (kone'ss Isha), meaning that Moses made them enter into the covenant with the Holy One, blessed be He, so that they form a single entity with Him. But beforehand, Moses had to assemble the Children of Israel in order to unite them, which is why he specified "the heads of your tribes, your elders ... all the men of Israel." Each one is placed according to rank and status, but only when it is a

matter of personal function. When it is a matter of the community of Israel, all should be completely united in friendship and fraternity, without anyone feeling superior to another. This is why Moses said, "You are standing today, all of you, before the L-RD your G-d", meaning that in the same way that you are united as a single person by love, you should also be united to G-d, and so He will be united to you. All this, however, is on condition that no one considers himself superior to another, even if he has high status.

Therefore, what does "to stand before the L-RD" mean? We can understand it in two ways. The first, that it means to "set the L-RD before me always" (Psalms 16:8), which means that in every circumstance and in every place, a man sees the reality of G-d before him. He sees it before him with awe, fear, and love, and not only in synagogue, but even in the street, outside. This is what Moses demanded of the community of Israel. "You are standing today, all of you, before the L-RD your G-d" means that in the same way that here, when you are assembled and standing before

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*The Pinto Associations across the world and their spiritual guide, Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita, send you their wishes for an excellent Shana Tova 5765. May everyone be inscribed in the Book of Life. Amen.*

the L-RD and are entered into a covenant with Him, in other circumstances His glory must also be felt, and you must constantly stand before Him with fear and trembling in all places. This deals not only with respect to a man and his Creator, but also between a man and his fellow. One must sense the honor of the other, be he present or not, for it is only in this way that the Torah is acquired – by love for G-d's creations and respect for one's fellow.

There is another, quite remarkable way of explaining it. When a man stands in a synagogue without feeling that it is like a miniature Temple (Megillah 29a), this attitude is very harmful, for once he is outside, how much more will he not feel awe for the glory of G-d. Now it is very grave to not take this as being important, whether it be in synagogue or elsewhere. We note that such was the spiritual state of Dathan and Abiram, of which it is written, "And Dathan and Abiram came out standing at the door of their tents" (Numbers 16:27). This took place with the generation of knowledge (Vayikra Rabba 9:1) who in the desert stood before the Shechinah, witnessed miracles, and saw that G-d spoke face to face with Moses (Numbers 12:8), a generation that G-d also spoke face to face with (Deuteronomy 5:4). Yet despite everything, they "came out standing at the door of their tents," meaning that they united in evil before the glory of G-d.

How could this happen to them? They stood at the door of their tents, and a tent always represents Torah (Berachot 63b). This means that they stood outside of the house of study, outside Torah, which is obviously considered as a sin on their behalf. This is a sign that even after they saw everything they did, they felt absolutely no change and remained outside of the tent. They found themselves perhaps physically inside, but deep down they remained outside, far from holiness. This distance led them to a terrible fall, to the point that they were not able to remain standing without fear or respect for the glory of G-d. All this stems from them not being united with Moses (for they ridiculed him) and from not feeling any love for their fellow. They therefore didn't feel the holiness of the place (not to mention that the Holy One, blessed be He, is called Makom, "The Place"), and they stood for evil before the glory of the Holy One, blessed be He.

Coming out from all of this is the fact that the one who has the habit of going to synagogue but does not pay attention to the holiness of the place, or someone who remains indifferent to the reality of G-d even outside of synagogue, proves by this that he lacks love for his fellow. This undermines the unity and collective responsibility of the people. In spirit, he "doesn't stand" in a steady way with his fellow, and consequently he behaves with the Holy One, blessed be He, sometimes in one way and sometimes in another. Everyone should therefore perform a careful introspection and ask himself why he has difficulty in recognizing the

holiness of the place and why secular ideas come to him at the moment of prayer, so much so that he does not perceive the reality of G-d. In this way, he will understand that all this stems from a lack of stability in his relationship with his fellow.

This is why the Torah says, "You are standing today, all of you, before the L-RD your G-d ... all the men of Israel." You must stand before G-d in the same way that one stands under the Chuppah, in making yourselves guarantors for one another in order to become a single body. And you will succeed in becoming united one to the other through the intermediary of "all the men of Israel." And if unfortunately you tamper with this stability, you will arrive at the sin of Dathan and Abiram, and your fear of Heaven and of the greatness of the glory of G-d will not be enough.

This is the connection between Parsha Nitzavim and Parsha Vayeilech. When will you be nitzavim (standing) before the L-RD? Only when vayeilech Moshe (Moses has gone); only when you will go to make yourselves guarantors one for the other without ulterior motives, each helping the other as Moses helped the community of Israel. Herein lies a great principle: Man's attachment to G-d must first start by man's love for others.

We may also explain this verse ("You are standing today, all of you") in yet another way.

At the end of our Parsha, it is written, "to dwell upon the land that the L-RD swore to your forefathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give lahem [to them]." (Deuteronomy 30:20). Now lahem is composed of the same letters as the word milah (circumcision), meaning that the Children of Israel are worthy of settling in Eretz Israel because of the merit of the Patriarchs who observed circumcision, the sign of the covenant. This is the meaning of the verse that states, "You are standing today, all of you, the heads of your tribes." When you observe circumcision, you are all righteous, and so you yourselves also become worthy of entering into Eretz Israel by the merit of circumcision. This sign of the covenant must continue to be observed by recalling that our father Abraham does not let one who is circumcised enter into Gehinnom (Eruvin 19a). By this, you can follow the paths of the Patriarchs and enter into the land, for they merited it by preserving their holiness, and you also should follow the same holy paths. We find an allusion to this idea in Rashi's statement that Moses assembled them in order to make them enter into a covenant. It is possible that he is speaking of the covenant of circumcision, for it allows the Children of Israel to stand before G-d and to merit inheriting the land.

## IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM RABBI DAVID HALEVI DRAA ZATSAL

**T**he gravesite of Rabbi David Halevi Draa, one of the most venerated saints among the Jews of Morocco, can be found in the village of Draa, not far from Dimneth. The tomb of Rabbi David is covered with immense palm tree branches, and for that reason this Tzaddik is also popularly known by the name *Mul Nachla Lechadra*, which translated means, “the Saint of the green palm tree.”

All throughout the year, numerous Jews come to make a pilgrimage at his gravesite, and the miracles that occur there astound everyone.

Once there was a Jew who was blind and crippled, and so he went to make a pilgrimage to the gravesite of Rabbi David Halevi Draa on the day of his *Hilloula*. After a short time, he suddenly realized that he could see and that his crippled limbs could move. The crowd about the man was staggered when this miracle occurred, and they began to sing and dance in a frenzy.

The man never left the place since that day. He built his house near the Tzaddik’s tomb, got married, and when his first son was born, he named him David after the Tzaddik.

Everyday one could witness a new miracle near the tomb of Rabbi David Halevi. Once, a child fell gravely ill and from day to day his sickness got worse, to the point that the doctors lost all hope of saving him. His father therefore made a vow that if his son would be healed, he would travel with his entire family to the tomb of Rabbi David Halevi to slaughter a sheep and distribute the meat to the poor. The child got better and the father traveled with his entire family to the tomb of Rabbi David in order to fulfill his vow.

On the way, his second son, a baby at the time, fell ill. His wife begged him to return home and to put the pilgrimage back until later. The husband stubbornly refused and affirmed that he had to fulfill his vow whatever the cost. When they arrived in Draa, the baby was even worse. The father prostrated himself on the tomb of the Tzaddik and prayed that his son also be healed.

For a long time the baby lay unconscious, not even crying. It then began to move its feet and hands, then burst into tears. The happy mother couldn’t believe her eyes. She gave the baby to eat and all trace of illness disappeared.

Up until our days, the Jews of Morocco pronounce the name of the Tzaddik Rabbi David Halevi with love and veneration, and from generation to generation people continue to recount the miracles that he performed during his lifetime and after his death.

## THE MORAL OF THE STORY *A teaching of the Maggid of Dubno*

It is written, “See – I have placed before you today the life and the good, and the death and the evil ... choose life, so that you may live, you and your offspring” (Deuteronomy 30:15,19).

It is curious that the verse begins by mentioning two things (“the life and the good”), yet ends by mentioning only one thing (“life”), instead of “choose the life and the good.” Apparently, this is meant to put man on guard against the temptation of thinking that since his free will makes him superior to the angels and all animals, he can act with impunity in everything that he decides to do. This is not so, the verse tells us, for even with free will one can only choose the path that G-d desires.

The Maggid of Dubno explains this Midrash to us with a parable.

A boy asked his father to bring him along on a trip. While on route, the father told him, “Go to the inn and tell them to prepare us something to eat.” He went and was told that they could make him whatever he pleased. He therefore ordered several types of dishes, which were prepared as he had asked. During this time his father was busy feeding the horses. When he arrived and saw the great banquet prepared for him and his son, he said nothing. After the meal he paid the innkeeper everything he was owed, but then immediately went to saddle the horses and left in the middle of the night. Since the boy was moaning, the father asked him, “What’s the matter with you?”

The boy replied, “What’s so urgent that we have to leave in the middle of the night? After the meal we ate, I need to sleep! I haven’t slept at all up to now, and I’m not used to this!”

The father therefore told him, “You should realize now that you made a big mistake by ordering meals that are so large that they put you to sleep. One should always eat light while on route, which is now the case, for we have still much to travel.”

They continued to ride until they arrived at an inn where a Brit Milah was scheduled for that morning. An excellent meal had been prepared, and since they were missing two men to complete the minyan, they were asked to join the ceremony. They do so, and partook of the festive meal where they ate and drank to satisfaction. The boy then turned to the father and said, “But you told me that it wasn’t good to eat anything but light meals while traveling! Why then did you partake of such a large meal?”

“Don’t be foolish! In any case, I still have to wait here to be part of the minyan and rest a little. And at the same time, an occasion to eat a good meal presents itself, a meal that I don’t have to wait or pay for! Why not take advantage of the situation? It’s not the same as ordering a large meal which makes me waste both time and money.”

“See – I have placed before you today the life and the good.” Today I prepared them for you; take of this good as much as you can. But as for you, “choose life” when you will have to choose. In fact, choose nothing but life, for if you begin to take what you desire, your soul will certainly lose out. Therefore leave this and Hashem will choose what is good for you and you will be satisfied, for He knows better what is appropriate for you.